

A third Philippine specimen of Chinese Crested-tern *Sterna bernsteini*

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The Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* is a highly enigmatic Asian seabird with a known breeding population of only a few pairs on the Mazu Dao islands in Taiwan, China (BirdLife International 2001). Peters (1934), followed by Mees (1975), established the first record of the species from the Philippines, a dataless skin in the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, supplied by Governor Cameron Forbes. Dickinson and Eck (1984) reported a second skin in the Staatliches Museum für Tierkunde, Dresden, taken in Manila Bay on 6 May 1905.

During a visit to the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales in Madrid in April 2003 I found a third specimen. This bird (MNCNM 23115) unfortunately discloses no more data than the one in MCZ. From the four labels it bears one can determine merely that it was sent to the museum by 'D. Sánchez', evidently during the time of Spanish rule of the Philippines (i.e. prior to 1898), which would make it the first of the three to have been collected there (the most recent of its four labels bears in pencil the words 'anterior a 1913', which one would assume—mistakenly—to be the date of cataloguing). In fact, the museum catalogues reveal that the specimen's year of accession was 1886, and that it was part of the avian material sent by Domingo Sánchez in that year as a commission from the Spanish government in preparation for a major exhibition on the Philippines that took place in Madrid in 1887 (J. Barreiro *in litt.* 2003). D. Sánchez is not mentioned in the list of collectors in Appendix 3 of Dickinson *et al.* (1991), although MNCNM is listed in their Appendix 1, and Sánchez (from my very cursory inspection) seemed to be responsible for a good percentage (if not all) of the museum's Philippine material.

The specimen has a black crown extending to the culmen above an otherwise white head (including white lores); the undersides are white; back, wings and tail

are pale silvery-grey, outer primaries mid-grey with whitish inner edges; legs black; bill yellow with a blackish distal third and a tiny yellowish tip – this last feature being specifically noted in the field by Liang *et al.* (2000). Bill from outer edge of nares is 44 mm, from feathers on culmen 59 mm; approximate width of blackish distal third 27 mm, yellow tip 2 mm; depth of bill at inner edge of nares 13 mm. Right wing 293 mm; tail 175 mm; tarsus 27 mm.

It is worth noting that the account of Chinese Crested-tern in BirdLife International (2001) makes repeated reference to Mees (1975), but accidentally omits the relevant citation from its bibliography.

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Notes on flocking and breeding behaviour of Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota* in eastern Tibet

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The Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota* is restricted to the Qinghai-Tibet plateau and the Himalayan mountains. Little has been published on the ecology of this species (Cheng *et al.* 1983, Ali and Ripley 1987, Grimmett *et al.* 1998). From May to October 1995, I regularly

observed this species at Sa Wang, eastern Tibet. I have also observed this species from 1995 to 2002 in eastern and northern Tibet, and during long-term ornithological surveys in the Lhasa region.

Table 1. Snow pigeon flock sizes.

Location and habitat	Period	Abundance
Sa Wang; 32°24'N 93°39'E; forest, riverbank and farmland; 3,600–4,500 m	Late May to mid-June 1995	18–120
	Late June to early October 1995	1–6
	Mid-October 1995	20–100
Duo Ji; 29°50'N 95°33'E; forest; riverbank; 3,500 m	Mid-May 2001	50–150
Chang Mao Ling; 31°24'N 96°00'E; forest, riverbank; 4,100 m	Late May 2001	25, 32
Lhasa region; 29°40'N 91°40'E; scrub, meadow, riverbank; 3,600–4,000 m	Throughout year, 1995–2002	2–5

Table 2. Measurements of two Snow Pigeon nestlings.

Date	Chick	Mass (g)	Body length (mm)	Tail (mm)	Wing (mm)	Bill (mm)	Tarsus (mm)
9 May	A	33.8	88.8	-	15.1	4.8	12.0
	B	40.0	100.0	-	17.0	6.8	13.5
4 June	A	136.0	162.0	13.0	58.1	8.3	22.2
	B	140.1	172.0	21.2	65.0	9.3	24.6

Snow Pigeons live in flocks during the non-breeding season, from mid-October to mid-June (Table 1), and forage on riverbanks and in valley-bottom barley fields, roosting on precipitous cliffs. Cheng *et al.* (1983) reported that this species occurs at 2,900–3,900m, but I found them up to 4,500m. Grimmett *et al.* (1998) gives 3,000–5,200 m (occasionally to 5,700 m) as the altitude in summer for this species.

A nesting attempt was recorded in Xiong Se valley (29°27'N 91°40'E), 30 km from Lhasa city. The nest-site was located at 4,020 m on a low cliff, 2.5 m above the ground, next to a stream. On 6 May 2001, I discovered an almost-complete nest, and saw both parents collecting nest material 50 m from the nest-site. The

nest was simply constructed from thin roots lined with grass stems, and measured 23.5 cm in diameter, 13.0 cm in depth and 10.5 cm in height. I returned on 29 May and found two chicks, with yellow down and open eyes, being brooded. I measured and weighed them, and repeated this on 4 June (Table 2). On 5 June, the two chicks were found dead below the nest-site having fallen out during a storm the previous night.

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Delayed plumage maturation in Asian thrushes, genus *Turdus*

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Intermediate plumages between juvenile and full adult plumages, particularly in males, have been widely documented in birds (Lyon and Montgomerie 1986). Among thrushes of the genus *Turdus*, however, this documentation has been limited to species with predominantly black plumage (Escalona-Segura and Peterson 1997). This phenomenon, however, has clearly been under-appreciated in the genus, and is distributed more broadly than had previously been thought. During

a recent expedition to Heilongjiang province, in north-eastern China, we were able to assemble series of specimens that allowed us to demonstrate that delayed plumage maturation is also present in the Grey-backed Thrush *Turdus hortulorum*, which is of the olive-and-red *Turdus* plumage type.

In this series, females were uniformly olive on the back, whitish on the belly, and finely streaked on the throat and upper breast (KU 92151 and one